

# Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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## The Religious Press and Modern Reform

We speak of the religious awakening of the sixteenth century as "The Reformation," and it is possible that in our thought we put into this phrase too much of the idea that that great movement accomplished all that was needed in the direction of reform, and left little for us to do but to enjoy the blessings purchased by the blood of the martyrs. This may be true concerning certain immutable doctrines of grace and salvation, but it is not true over the whole field either of doctrine, or morals, or benevolence. Every true Christian is a reformer, and every church of God is an association of reformers, and every church paper which rightly interprets its mission is a mighty engine of reform, growing more and more potent as the course of events and the trend of the world plant the printing press more firmly in the place of power.

We are to treat this subject more especially with reference to the temperance question, that great reform of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Second only to that reformation which re-resurrected Christ and re-discovered the Bible, the temperance reform, despite its enemies who revile it, despite its false friends who betray it, despite the indifferent multitude who disdain it, and despite the mountainous obstacles which a hostile world and a furious hell interpose in its path, is nevertheless the greatest reform of the ages, fraught with unspeakable blessings to mankind, and certain of ultimate victory. We need not to persuade our readers on this point. Our souls rest upon the greatness and righteousness of our cause. It is not puerile; it is not the agitation of a few fanatics or weak women who love popularity. It is worthy of the purest devotion, the noblest self-sacrifice, the loftiest courage, the greatest perseverance, the sublimest faith. It is a reform so great and so noble that it makes its champions great. They are not dreaming of statues and the dubious immortality of the world's applause, but the time is coming,—it may be far-distant—when a grateful world will raise statues to the heroes of temperance, and place their names among the benefactors of the race.

But is the victory far distant? Perhaps there is no other instrumentality to whom this question comes with such weight of responsibility as to the religious press. This responsibility has been shifted too much to the distinctively temperance press, as a mat-

ter for them to deal with, and it has been left with them to give energy and direction to the movement, and inspiration to its leaders and votaries. But the responsibility can not thus be evaded. The temperance movement is too nearly related to the cause of universal righteousness and to the kingdom of Christ. The church press may neglect it, and in a large measure does neglect it, but in so doing, it ignores its most solemn duty and betrays its most sacred mission. The responsibility rests with the religious press, because it has the power to "pulverize the rum traffic," and wipe the abominable stuff from the face of the earth, and along with its power to do comes its responsibility. Before God, every agency for good is responsible to the extent of the power with which heaven has invested it. Ability to do and responsibility go hand in hand. When we speak of the religious press we do not confine ourselves to the editors who are supposed to shape and control its policy, but include in it the large army of weekly contributors, and with this broad view we do not think it too much to say that the religious press of America represents the brain and intellect of the Christian church. It is this that gives the press its power. We do not hesitate to say that the hundreds of thousands of religious papers which every week find their way into Christian homes, carry with them the best thought of the best men, and the fruit of the highest scholarship. As an agency for the moulding of public sentiment, the press has no equal among all the regenerating and vitalizing agencies operating for the uplift of humanity, the reclamation of the lost, the evangelization and salvation of the world. Let it be known that back of the press there is a power, a moral and religious force which if directed in the proper channel would effect a mighty revolution. If the church press would as a unit espouse this temperance reform with that energy, that enthusiasm and that perseverance which belongs to the discharge of a divine mission, this generation would celebrate the splendid triumph of this cause of humanity, and hell would remove her darkest shadow from the history of the world and from the souls of men. Let this statement burn down deep into every soul, for indirectly, the constituency of the press, is partly responsible for the sentiment of the church paper on the question of temperance. More than once have we heard the confident

assertion that if every professing Christian would renounce the saloon and vote on every occasion for its extinction, employing at the same time his influence with others in behalf of the same object, that this abomination would instantly go down into richly merited defeat and ruin. Let us go behind this statement with all its implication of shame upon him who dares to name Christ with a rum polluted breath, or take the holy communion with a saloon stained hand, and let us say that if the entire religious press would do its manifest duty and rouse the sleeping conscience of the church, and kindle the universal fires of Christian zeal, then would the saloon quickly go down before a storm of righteous indignation, and the strong angel with the great chain in his hand, and the key of the bottomless pit, would do his mission upon its diabolical carcass. An enthusiastic temperance man said that he wondered why God did not send his lightnings and smite every rumseller and every saloon. Another answered that God had lightnings enough, what he wanted was conductors. That is what God is waiting for. He has the thunder and he has the lightning, and he will strike the fatal blow when the conductors are supplied. That is our part of the work. When the religious press has awakened to a full sense of its mission and its responsibility, when along with the pulpit it has done its work of education, and the development of sentiment, when the Christian church with all its agencies will have supplied the "conductors," when every male member of the church above twenty-one years of age, will have attained to that Christian manhood when he will dare, in the face of the devil and all his agents, walk to the polls and cast a ballot for God and humanity, then God will send the lightning, and the thunder, and the saloon will be no more, for when once we get at the liquor traffic with votes, its friends will never know whether it was lightning or dynamite that struck them.

But how are we to arouse the religious press to a sense of its duty in respect of the temperance reform? There is a question in regard to the secular press whether its chief function is to reflect public sentiment or to mould it; whether it should lead or follow. Secular papers may obsequiously seek to discover the popular drift and to pander to the popular taste, but this nerveless and merciless policy should never be charged against the religious press. We doubt even if that is the right of the secular press. Every secular paper should be a moulder of